

PARRS WOOD SCHOOL

Organisation	Edmund Kirby
Trigger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school's concern about the pupils' safety and education. • The willingness of the architect to respond to the school's needs.
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To design a completely new school which would guarantee pupil security and promote learning.
Tools/techniques	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening to feedback. • Attending consultation meetings and giving presentations to parents and teachers.
Enablers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared commitment to ensuring security. • Ability to draw upon experience designing retail buildings. • Simplicity and elegance of the overall design.
Tensions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None related to crime.
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The headmaster is proud of the school. • The school has attracted considerable publicity. • The architects practice has demonstrated its ability to meet the needs of this market. • The school has not suffered from crime since the introduction of CCTV.
Lessons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The design should fulfil the needs of the client. • If fully consulted, clients believe that they have designed the building. • Listening is vitally important.

Synopsis

This case study concerns a firm of architects who worked closely with the headmaster in the design of a school in Didsbury, Manchester. Whilst the school's headmaster was primarily concerned with promoting learning, the school also had to be designed to resist criminal damage, protect pupils from unwanted intruders and deter bullying. Pupil security was achieved by having a single point of entry and a central reception, around which pupils and teachers were forced to flow as they passed to the different curriculum centres. The offices occupied by heads of department were strategically placed, overlooking potential trouble spots, such as stairs. Carpeted corridors are lined with lockers and flooded with light from high windows in the core of the building. This pleasant environment generates respect from pupils, who are expected to care for their new building by, for example, picking up litter and creating artwork. The new school attracted considerable publicity for its stylist and innovative design, which deters crime without creating a 'fortress' style building. It has since become recognised for its educational excellence, especially in technology.

Background to Parrs Wood School

Parrs Wood High School is a highly successful comprehensive school in Didsbury, Manchester. In 1996, it had 1800 pupils housed in two sets of buildings, the main school – formally a mixture of run down and uninspiring structures dating from the 1970s - and the Sixth Form Centre, built in the 1980s. The school governors and Manchester City Council decided to form a consortium to redevelop the school and surrounding park into a completely new state-of-the-art school and extensive leisure development (Jones, 1999). Parrs Wood School project was unusual in that a complete school was built, rather than just a new block being added to an existing building.

Manchester City Council and the Governors of Parrs Wood High School first advertised their wish to redevelop the site in the Official Journal of the European Union. David Cullearn, Partner at Edmund Kirby and Michael Armstrong, Director of Thornfield, immediately arranged a meeting with the school's Headmaster, Iain Hall and attended a tour of the site. Manchester City Council's main requirements at this stage were evidence of financial stability and ability to secure funding, an experienced development team, long-term commitment and some initial ideas. The team comprising Thornfield, Ballast Wiltshier (an international construction company) and Edmund Kirby presented a full sketch scheme right at the start – they were the only ones to do this.

The development team was short-listed for the second stage and, after more detailed briefings, revised bids were submitted early in 1997 and short-listed to two. According to the Headmaster, the design produced by Edmund Kirby was favoured because it retained the sixth form function throughout the development process. The architects from Edmund Kirby believe that they beat off competition from 30 other companies because of their willingness to listen to the needs of teachers, which included concerns about security.

Schools have been recognised as a particular concern with respect to crime, both because of the vulnerability of children and of schools susceptibility to arson, burglaries, vandalism and unwelcome intrusion. Apart from the costs of criminal behaviour and the threats to physical well-being of staff and pupils, schools are also aware of the potentially negative effects of crime and aggressive behaviour generally (e.g. bullying) on education. Particularly since the Dunblane incident, schools have made increasing efforts to improve security (Design Against Crime, 2000). The DfEE and Architectural Liaison Groups have produced guidelines to support schools and developers in the process of design (e.g. Greater Manchester Police, 2001)

Although some information was gained from visiting the school and meeting briefly with the Headmaster, this case study is based primarily on in-depth interviews with David Cullearn, Partner, Edmund Kirby, who established the Parrs Wood Project and James Jones, Architect, responsible for its implementation. Founded 130 years ago, Edmund Kirby is an independent group of architects, surveyors and town planners, which advises across the entire spectrum of property, construction design and development, from project inception through to its occupation. The company prides itself on being able to provide innovative solutions to problems (Edmund Kirby, 2001). Other consultants, the majority of whom were employed by Ballast Wiltshier, included mechanical and electrical engineers, landscape architects, acoustic engineers and structural engineers (Jones, 1999). The quantity surveyors, Rider Hunt, was appointed as the client's agent.

Design Process

Concept

Thornfield and Edmund Kirby liaised extensively with the Head and school Governors and this revealed issues of poor security arising from the fact that the school had at that time 22 entrances. The architects proposed making the school secure by having only one or two entrances, which would be protected by a manned reception desk. The entrance would bring pupils and visitors into a central reception area or 'mall', through which they would be forced to pass on moving through the building. Leading off from the central area was to be a series of curriculum blocks where the teaching took place. This was desired by the Headmaster as a means of creating an effective learning environment.

The notion of a central 'mall' leading into other areas and regulating the throughput of people was based on designs used by the architects in relation to retail developments. The school was structurally similar to a large office block and was considered 'revolutionary' in its design.

Development

The design was first put together in words, using concepts derived from viewing the site and talking to the different groups. It was then developed into initial preliminary drawings, which were followed by further details about how the building would be assembled – even a drawing by an artist provided further insight into certain features. Early on, it was difficult to know how the final design would look and changes were made almost daily. Since all the uses of the building could not possibly be known, the architects strived to build in flexibility. The school was built in a series of three phases and the school was in continual operation throughout the project.

Design

The concept of a single point of entry and trouble spots observed by teachers was incorporated into all aspects of the design to ensure the security and welfare of the pupils. Thus, pupils enter through a series of 6 doors located at the front of the building (see figure 1).



Figure 1: Entrance to Parrs Wood
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They next pass into the reception area, where there is a reception desk for visitors and staff, as well as a reception desk for pupils, manned by pupils (see figure 2). Reception staff also has access to CCTV screens recording activities within the school. Thus, individuals are always subject to observation within the school.



Figures 2: Reception area inside the building

The occurrence of bullying and criminal activities (such as vandalism) was designed against by placing the rooms of Heads of Department on the second floor, overlooking key trouble spots in the school such as stairs. The staff room itself overlooks the central mall.



Figures 3: Internal windows
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Following consultation with pupils, the Headmaster introduced CCTV in the toilets at head height to reduce the incidence and fear of bullying. This enables staff to ensure that groups of pupils are not hiding in the toilets, potentially intimidating children and provides video evidence, in the event of bullying allegations.

The interior of the school ensures visibility as well as control. For example, the stairs are in the middle of the corridor and fairly open in style.



Figures 4: Stairway

Since the corridors do not turn back on themselves and all routes lead to the centre, it is easy for people to find their way around the school and difficult to hide away undetected. David Cullearn says of the school's design that:

"You don't get lost. This is important when putting together a building. It should have its own natural route. You can feel where you are – it not a maze. In fire terms that is also important. If you have public routes, then you can take visitors around. There is the concept of 'a route', which is an added feature. If you know where you are, you feel secure and know that others cannot be hiding in nooks and crannies" (Partner, Edmund Kirby).

In addition, the lockers were placed along corridors, not hidden away, thus making it difficult for them to be broken into undetected.



Figure 5: Lockers

The school is flooded by natural light from windows located near the roof and artwork was hung on the walls (see figures 6 and 7). This creates a pleasant environment and has implications for the way in which pupils treat it. David Cullearn believes that: *“Buildings have to respect people, then people respect them”*.



Figures 6 and 7: Artwork along the wide, light corridors

Tensions

The main considerations for the design of the school concerned the number of curriculum centres leading off from the central area. The architects wanted to ensure that the school was secure due to the flow of pupils through a central point, without creating an area of congestion, frustration and potentially anger leading to fights or criminal damage. The school staff conducted extensive studies to predict the flow of pupils through the school and remained concerned about congestion, which does occur at some busy times. The headmaster also requested an ‘S’ bend in the corridor to discourage pupils from seeing friends further ahead and running towards them.

It was proposed that pupils would enter the school from two directions, one of which involved crossing a footbridge rather than a road. Whilst parking was conveniently located next to the school, which linked via one door with a sports centre, pupils do have to cross a road to the sports ground.

In addition, the school does not have fencing around it, only CCTV cameras. This is somewhat unusual, and reflects the proximity of the leisure complex also built on the site. The situation at Parrs Wood School requires a strong approach from teachers and the Headmaster, who carefully monitor pupils to ensure they stay away from the leisure complex. Indeed, David Cullearn commends the Headmaster for his running of the school:

“Iain Hall runs the school very well. He doesn’t adopt a completely authoritarian approach. The presence of teachers overlooking key points is enough” (Partner, Edmund Kirby).

The Headmaster teaches pupils respect for themselves, others and the environment. For example, pupils are asked to pick up litter dropped inside the building and schemes have been introduced where some of the older pupils are paid to police the flowerbeds and the dinner hall. Later, there were 40 CCTV cameras installed around the perimeter of the school to prevent burglary; a security guard monitors these.



Figure 8: Parrs Wood School
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Consultation

There were a lot of different groups that had to be consulted during the development of the school, including the Local Authority, fire prevention officers and crime prevention people from the Architectural Liaison Group. The final design very much reflects the wishes of the headmaster, explain the architects:

“The Headmaster is convinced that it is his design. You can’t tell people what to do. You have to set up a dialogue. You meet them as often as you can, right from the beginning. You explain what you are going to consult with others. You have to pick up the philosophy of the job” (Partner, Edmund Kirby).

All parties were issued with a Project Handbook detailing approved lines of communication. This channelled all communication between the consultant teams and the client teams through Ballast Wiltshier and Rider Hunt, so all proposals likely to affect cost could be monitored.

Impact

The school was finished at the beginning of 1999 and the leisure complex is planned to finish 2001. The opening ceremony for Parrs Wood School was broadcast live on Radio 4. Some years later, the school produced an information pack called ‘*A Celebration of Parrs Wood*’, which included an article on the role of the architects. The Headmaster has attracted considerable publicity for the ‘dream’ school, described as a triumph:

“... carpeted corridors of the building that in parts look more like a hotel than a school... [a] stark contrast to the crumbling labyrinth” (Feddy, 2000).

Edmund Kirby believes that design helps to create a pleasant, yet secure environment, without creating the type of regimented atmosphere associated with schemes where parents have to pay for damage caused by their children.

The school has not had a single break in since the introduction of CCTV cameras monitored by the reception staff by day and a security firm by night (Haile, 2001).

The experience of designing a high profile school has made Edmund Kirby keen to bid for further work building schools in the North West. Although many of the lessons learned will be passed on, the architects are aware of the needs to adapt schemes to the local context. For example, fences would probably be used on others sites in the North West.

Lessons Learned

The incorporation of crime prevention into the overall design appears to have reduced the need for further discussion, compromise and possible tension regarding security. The ability to listen and work in partnership was fundamental to the project's success, whilst the relationship with the contractor, Ballast Wiltshier helped the architects cope with the stresses caused by design changes and delays.

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References, Related Case Studies and Further Reading

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Feddy, K. (2000) Big Mother is Watching. *Manchester Evening News*. 20th September, pp3.

Greater Manchester Police (2001) *Designing Out Crime: Schools and Colleges*. Architectural Liaison Unit, Community Affairs Branch, Greater Manchester Police. Manchester.

Haile, D (2001) Why School Crooks are Camera Shy. *Manchester Evening News*, 17th January, pp5

Edmund Kirby (2001) *Building on a Reputation*. Company Brochure.

James Jones (1999) *Parrs Wood School Redevelopment*. Case study written for Professional Development. Edmund Kirby. Manchester

Classification Index

Ekblom's crime classification	Misbehaviour (criminal damage, abuse), misappropriation (theft).
BCS crime classification	Theft, burglary, criminal behaviour.
DAC	Protecting pupils and the school.
Primary motivation	Social – to protect children and promote education
Type of designer	Architects
Approach	Using knowledge of retail environment
Sector	Education
Location	School
Author	Caroline Davey

DAC Edmund Kirby